Twelve Not So Angry Men: Inclusive Masculinities in Australian Contact Sports

Abstract

Sport's utility in the development of a conservative orthodox ideal of masculinity based upon homophobia, aggression and emotional restrictiveness, is well evidenced in critical masculinities scholarship. However, contemporary research is reflecting a more nuanced understanding of male behaviour in many Western contexts, with men performing softer and more inclusive versions of masculinities. Through exploring the experiences of twelve Australian contact sport athletes, this research establishes findings to support the growing body of inclusive masculinities research. Results show that these men value a softer representation of masculinity based upon pro-gay sentiments and being emotionally open; while often being critical of aspects of orthodox masculinities which male team sport previously promoted.

Keywords: Homophobia; Inclusive Masculinity; Masculinity; Sport

Introduction

Organised team sports have often been considered a key vehicle for the production of a socially valued archetype of heteromasculinity, based upon men being aggressive, stoic and homophobic (Crosset, 1990; Hargreaves, 1986; Pronger, 1990; Rowe, 1999; Whitson, 1990). Yet, contemporary accounts of sportsmen in both the United Kingdom and the United States show a somewhat different understanding of masculinity in the athletic terrain today (Anderson, 2014). Although the literature on contact sports - such as rugby union, rugby league and Australian Rules Football - have been part of this historical discussion (Donnelly and Young, 1988; Grundlingh, 1994; Hargreaves, 1986; Light and Kirk, 2000; Muir and Seitz, 2004; Sheard and Dunning, 1973), little is understood about how today's Australian contact athletes construct and perform masculinities in light of the developments from Anderson's (2009) Inclusive Masculinity Theory (IMT).

Additions in the field of critical masculinities research have proposed a softening of masculinities and a transformation of the gender order in response to improved social attitudes towards homosexuality (McCormack, 2012). By examining cultural homohysteria (men's fear of being *socially perceived* as homosexual), Anderson (2009) has evidenced a change in the gender performances of young British and American men; and only more recently among undergraduate men in Australia (Drummond, Filiault, Anderson and Jefferies, 2015). As cultural antipathy towards homosexuality has reduced, many athletes no longer aspire to the traditional orthodox masculinity that requires overt aggressiveness, misogyny and homophobia. Rather, contemporary adolescents embrace gay peers (Anderson, 2011a, 2013), are emotionally open (Anderson, 2014) and present in styles once considered effeminate (Adams, 2011). Homophobia has lost its ability to police male gender and therefore multiple archetypes of masculinity can be equally esteemed (Anderson, 2009).

This study explores the experiences of twelve Australian athletes who have participated in the contact team sports of rugby union, rugby league and Australian Rules Football. Their narratives offer a complex understanding of masculinities among athletes in contemporary contact sports and give further evidence of inclusive masculinities among sportsmen. Based on these results, it is our contention that we can no longer accept Australian contact sport athletes as inherently homophobic or

emotionally stoic without further critical examination of their narratives, experiences or attitudinal positioning.

Sport and Masculinities

In an attempt to understand the narratives of these twelve Australian contact sportsmen, it is important to provide a sociological theory for the understanding of masculinities. We use Anderson's (2009) Inclusive Masculinity Theory because it provides a nuanced understanding of masculinities across time and context - primarily through its central concept of homohysteria. By accounting for a cultures' understanding of homosexuality, and homophobia's utility to regulate male gender (Kimmel, 1994; McCreary, 1994), it is possible to evaluate why men perform in a manner to align to orthodox or softer masculinities (Adams, 2011; Anderson, 2009, 2014; McCormack, 2012; Roberts, 2013).

Homohysteria is based upon the fear of being socially considered gay: therefore IMT offers a dynamic understanding of the ebb and flow of homophobia for all men as a result of forever changing cultural understanding of homosexuality (Plummer, 2014). McCormack and Anderson (2014) describe three components which impact the level of homohysteria in a culture, these are: (1) cultural antipathy of homosexuality, (2) recognition of homosexuality as a legitimate sexual orientation that we are likely to come in contact with, and (3) the conflation of homosexuality with femininity. A homohysteric culture is thus one where men fear being thought homosexual, primarily due to the social stigma attached to homosexuality (Herek, 2004), which in turn forces them to actively distance themselves from behaviours considered feminine and gay. In short, homohysteria bifurcates gender through homophobia. Yet when the social understanding of homosexuality changes, the dynamics of gender performance also shift.

Homohysteric Culture of Sport

In a homohysteric culture, men have to either be complicit to this gender system, by attempting to associate with orthodox notions of masculinity, or face subordination through being considered feminine, gay or both. Connell (1995) describes the gender order, in her concept of Hegemonic Masculinity, whereby men are hierarchically stratified with a specific archetype holding cultural gender power over other men. In a homohysteric environment, David and Brannon's (1976) four rules of masculinity are

a useful analogy to explain this orthodox archetype of masculinity, as they claim men must 'be a sturdy oak', 'be a big wheel', 'give 'em hell' and do 'no sissy stuff'. Although David and Brannon's (1976) rules do not mention anything about compulsory heterosexuality, it is the cultural conflation of homosexuality with femininity, or 'sissy stuff' in David and Brannon's words, that forces orthodox masculinity to be an opposition to the culturally subordinate homosexuality (Connell, 1995). However, this becomes problematic for many men, primarily due to their inability to prove their heterosexuality. As Anderson (2009:95) contends, 'In a homohysteric culture, heterosexual men are culturally incapable of permanently proving their heterosexuality'. As sexuality is an invisible characteristic, boys and men are therefore socially required to use homophobia and exaggerated orthodox masculinity in an attempt to position themselves away from behaviours coded as homosexual.

In homohysteric cultures, such as much of the Western world in the 1980s, sport was a valued social institution that socialised men into conservative orthodox ideals of heterosexual masculinity (Pronger, 1990). It was the male only, unreflexive and near-total institutional aspects of sport that reproduced and maintained what could be considered a socially damaging ideal of male behaviour (Anderson, 2010). However, such oppressive social environments can change; as when homohysteria declines, social attitudes become more inclusive.

Inclusivity

In times of improved social attitudes towards homosexuality, as currently seen in many Western countries (Clements and Field, 2014; Keleher and Smith, 2012), men no longer fear being socially perceived as gay, and therefore homohysteria begins to decline. Here, men are afforded an increasing range of acceptable gender performances, which captivate many of the behaviours previously only granted to women (Anderson, 2009). Anderson (2014: 53) comments:

> Many of the long-held codes, behaviors, and other symbols of what separates masculine men from feminine men (who were therefore homosexualised) are blurring, making behaviors and attitudes increasingly problematic to describe as masculine, feminine, and thus gay or straight.

This behaviours includes men engaging in same-sex cuddling, emoting, and styling themselves in tight colourful clothing without being considered homosexual by

friends or peers. Anderson (2009, 2014) and McCormack (2012) show these are not the only benefits to a culture with diminished homohysteria, with the acceptance of gay men also being widespread.

In cultures of inclusivity, intra-male masculine hierarchies also transform as a result of reduced or diminished homohysteria. Rather than being hierarchically stratified – like Connell (1995) theorises in homohysteric cultures - in an epoch of inclusivity, masculinities are more laterally aligned; even if some forms of masculinity might dominate, none are hegemonic (Anderson, 2009, 2014; McCormack, 2012). Inclusive masculinities, based upon pro-gay, pro-women and pacifistic attitudes, are equally esteemed to the orthodox masculinities previously evidenced (Connell, 1995; Mac an Ghail, 1994; Pronger, 1990). This notion of more than one archetype of masculinity being culturally valued is what makes IMT so useful; its ability to recognise multiple masculinities holding near-equally socially valued, with no archetypes of masculinity holding hegemony, or being subordinated, makes it effective for the understanding of contemporary male gender power dynamics.

Although inclusive masculinity sounds especially positive, it is important to highlight, it is not proposing a postfeminist image of gender utopia (Anderson, 2014), where men no longer hold patriarchal privilege over women. It is also not a suggestion that other demographical factors, such as race and class, are no longer important. It is rather the recognition of other socially valued and legitimate masculine performance that has resisted the previous orthodox notions of heterosexual masculinity to be symmetrically appreciated in youth culture in many western societies.

While a culture of inclusivity is considerably more democratic towards gender, it is not one where peer hierarchies do not exist and thus young men still need to perform in ways that can increase their social capital. McCormack (2012) shows that popularity is now based upon displays of "charisma, authenticity, emotional support and social fluidity" (McCormack, 2012:107) rather than aggression, misogyny and homophobia seen in the homohysteric epoch (Mac an Ghaill, 1994). There is, however, limited evidence that Australasian male youth also exhibit inclusive masculinities. Drummond et al. (2015) examined the prevalence of kissing among straight male athletes and non-athletes in an Australian university. Concurrent with the findings of previous inclusive masculinity scholarship on same-sex kissing

(Anderson, Adams and Rivers, 2012), Australian men were also kissing their male friends (Drummond et al. 2015), although in lesser rates than British men, and higher rates than American. Although Anderson (2014) found more non-athletes to be kissing than athletes, in the UK, this was not evident in the Australian study. Anderson (2014) describes this as a cultural lag, whereby some western societies are transforming with varying pace. We, therefore, consider it necessary to further examine and understand the Australian context as one location underexplored by IMT scholars.

IMT and Sport

It might seem ironic that inclusive masculinities first emerge in an arena that used to be so hostile to homosexuality. However, Anderson (2014) theorises that it is precisely because of the heterosexual capital that athletes are attributed, that they were able to break down the meanings of masculinity. Further evidencing this, in research of openly gay athletes in the U.S., Anderson (2011a) found a change in the coming out narratives within their sports teams. Athletes in the late 1990s would come out, often having to segment their homosexuality from their athletic identity, similar to that of the *don't ask, don't tell* policies of the U.S. Army. Instead, today's gay male athletes were open, and fully included among their teams. They discuss their homosexuality with teammates and often engaging in graphic conversations about gay sex and relationships (Anderson, 2011b). Conveniently, in Adams and Anderson's (2012) ethnographic study of a university soccer team in the U.S., one athlete opted to come out to teammates, offering a unique and rich research event. Subsequently, open discussions of same-sex sex were found between teammates; fostering an environment of support and inclusivity (Adams and Anderson, 2012).

Further literature on soccer supports the claim that homophobia is in decline both on the playing field and among spectators (Cashmore and Cleland, 2011, 2012; Cleland, 2014; Magrath, Anderson and Roberts, 2013), and thus the positive environments found in both of the above studies (Adams and Anderson, 2012; Anderson, 2011b; Anderson and Adams, 2011) are not as a result of uniquely liberal environments. Athletes are no longer required to be athletically elite, rather regardless of sporting ability homosexual athletes are being embraced by their teammates (Anderson, 2011a).

Accordingly, there appears to be a generational change in effect. Evidencing this, as part of an ethnographic study of a British university rugby team, Anderson and McGuire (2010) found resistance to the tenets of orthodox masculinity that their coaches embodied through various discourses, including gendered and anti-gay language (Anderson and McGuire, 2010). These players expressed frustration and anger at their coaches use of terms such as poof, gay and pussy as well as the degrading of women and disregard for health when injured. Similarly, Adams, Anderson and McCormack (2010) found resistance to the aggressive and violent discourses of soccer coaches, with their participants questioning the need for such violent, warrior rhetoric's.

The softening of masculinities has also allowed athletes to improve their homosocial relations, primarily via emotional openness and physical tactility (Anderson, 2013, 2014; Anderson and McCormack, 2014). Emoting is emerging as a key component of inclusive masculinities in times of reduced homohysteria (Anderson, 2014). These athletes are able to cry in public, they support each other with emotional concerns and the openly express their bromances (a close intimate same-sex male friendship that often involves exclusive emotional disclosure). Often, the young athletes of today link their Facebook accounts claiming that they are in relationships with their best friends as a symbol of endearment (Anderson, 2013), which is similar to McCormack's (2012) findings which shows close friends greeting one another with expressions such as 'hey boyfriend'.

The 21st century athlete is not only limited to verbally expressing their close friendships, but many are physically tactile. For example, cuddling and spooning (close cuddling in bed, often wearing only underwear) was found to be ubiquitous among university team sport athletes in the UK (Anderson and McCormack, 2014). Some of the men discussed how they would rather share a bed with their bromances rather than their sexual conquests (Anderson, 2014). This is further evidenced by a systematic exploration of undergraduate British men's use of Facebook (Scoats, Forthcoming), where straight men are shown to be more affectionate with other men, than they are with women.

Inclusive masculinities research has, therefore, significantly advanced our understanding of youth masculinities in Anglo-American cultures; especially in the realm of sport. Here, researchers have shown improved social attitudes towards

homosexuality and sometimes women; increased homosocial behaviours; and a reduction in aggression among today's sportsmen (Adams, 2011; Bush, Anderson and Carr, 2012; Cashmore and Cleland, 2011, 2012; Channon and Matthews, 2015; Cleland, 2014; Crocket, 2012; Dashper, 2012, Jarvis, 2015; Magrath, Anderson and Roberts, 2014; Michael, 2013).

Yet, there is a dearth of inclusive masculinities scholarship in both the Australian context, with only one notable exception (Drummond et al., 2015), and on body contact sports (Anderson, McCormack and Lee, 2012; Anderson and McGuire, 2010). Contributing to previous literature, this research seeks to close that gap by examining the experiences of twelve contact sportsmen in Australia.

Methods

This research, was initially focused upon understanding Australian contact sportsmen's conceptions of masculinity, with explicit attention being focused upon violence, deviant behaviours, sexism and homophobia. These themes for investigation were chosen due to the initial literature review that focused on the works of Connell (1995) and Messerschmidt (2006) and hegemonic masculinity as its foundations. Yet, the findings contested what Connell or Messerschmidt suggested masculinity to be. This article thus focuses upon softer narratives that these athletes presented, and this required a new way of theorising the data: Anderson's, Inclusive Masculinity Theory (Anderson, 2009) best fit the data. As such, all of the themes were born directly from the data with no prior consideration given to inclusive masculinities before the interviews were conducted.

Similar to other IMT scholars (Anderson, 2011; Anderson and Bullingham, 2015; Magrath et al., 2014; McCormack, 2012), this research involved extensive semi-structured interviewing, in this case of twelve subjects about their experiences of sport and attitudes towards masculinity. By investigating the narratives of these sportsmen, we can determine the social processes and constructions of masculinities for which they value (West and Zimmerman, 1987). An interview schedule was used to allow comprehensive discussions of various themes within masculinities, with all interviews being conducted by the first author. The primary themes for discussion included: home life, schooling, sexual awakening, masculinity/femininity, violence, crises and the body. This method allows organic conversations to develop around

researcher-determined topics; it was this flexibility that subsequently allowed participants to proffer their softer archetypes of masculinity.

Participants

Twelve players from three codes of football - rugby league, rugby union and Australian Rules Football - were interviewed. All participants played at a competitive, representative or professional level. A convenient purposive sampling strategy was used for this research utilising a key contact (a respected coach) to gain access to all of the participants, due to his work across all three codes of contact football.

Four footballers, aged between 18 and 31, were selected from each of the three aforementioned body contact codes, specifically those who were currently playing and had participated in their respective sports no more than ten years, before the date of the interview (Messerschmidt, 2000). This requirement was to ensure that the participants were up-to-date sources of information regarding each football code. Eight of the men were Caucasian, one was Fijian, one Indian and two Indigenous Australian. The men had a range of careers from manual labour to professional careers. The education levels were varied with six having only high school education, one had a trade certificate, one had a bachelors degree, three had masters degrees and one had attended law school. There was an equal split between Christianity and no religion.

Procedure

After explaining the study's aims and procedure, each of the participants consented to their partaking in the research. Participants were reminded their right to withdraw, confidentiality, and to view the transcripts of their interviews, although none did. All participants are given pseudonyms and subsequently their responses are confidential. Interviews were conducted in a location suggested by the participants, these included interview rooms at a university and participant selected locations, such as home addresses. Interviews lasted between 50 minutes and 2 hours in length, with the average 1 hour and 11 minutes. The twelve interviews were completed in a six-week period. The first interview was completed on 13 January 2014, while the last interview was finalised on 26 February 2014.

All interviews were recoded using an electronic recording device and transferred to a password-protected computer. The interviews were transcribed

verbatim by a professional university employed transcribe and crosschecked by the first author for quality assurance.

Analysis

A thematic analysis was adopted to examine the in-depth narratives these participants offered (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 77). This was used as it allowed us to identify, analyse and report patterns (themes) in the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 78). The initial data analysis was conducted by the first author, whereby the theme inclusive masculinities was inductively coded from the data. The second author refined this group into the themes; decreasing violence, emotionality, pro-gay attitudes and blurred gender behaviours. The refined themes were cross verified by each author to improve reliability of data coding and they were agreed. Decreasing violence, due to its complexity, has been removed from the data presented as part of this article, which focuses upon those behaviours that align to inclusive masculinity theory. It is important to recognise the themes reported in this article were unexpectedly born from the participants' narratives, proffering softer and more egalitarian narratives.

Findings

Emotionally open

In alignment with softer masculinities (Anderson, 2014), these men were open about their emotions, including things that pressure them, upset them or evoked anxiety. In our interviews, these men discussed a range of areas, including pressures to be sexually active, being scared of violence, athletic failures and emotional heartbreak that romantic partners cause. Although many of the topics discussed could be seen as components of orthodox masculinity (Connell, 1995), the data presented here openly challenges what were previously requirements of masculinity.

These contact sportsmen spoke about the pressures they faced to lose their virginity or be sexually active at a young age, sometimes against their own or parents' feelings. Rich, for example, didn't lose his virginity at a young age and subsequently expressed, 'Yeah, I felt the pressure to lose my virginity, like all the boys were on my back'. Whereas older literature showed men were required to be sexually active and emotionally stoic to embody an esteemed masculinity (Mac an Ghaill, 1994), Rich is able to be critical of the constraints orthodox masculinity imposed upon his emerging adulthood, through open emotional discussion. Romeo, also discussing the pressures

of sex, after he felt terrible following hooking up with a married woman while on a rugby tour, often considered a right of passage in rugby subculture. He expressed, 'I think it was the worst decision I ever made, hooking up with that married woman… her husband kept calling her while we were having sex'. Although it is apparent that these men felt the pressures to conform to orthodox notions of masculinity, through being sexually active and dominant, they offer emotive narratives that show their disapproval towards orthodox masculinity.

Ryan discussed an experience of when his girlfriend slept with another man, expressing his emotions and how it affected his self-esteem. He said, 'When she cheated on me, it was one of the biggest crisis… I started to think low of myself, feeling I'm not good enough and that I'm inadequate… I feel, very, very, very insecure'. Here, these participants are negotiating and challenging two aspects of orthodox masculinity, namely stoicism and sexual dominance, while offering their more emotionally open narratives. Although it's possible this is a back-stage performance (Goffman, 1959), there is no reason to suggest this isn't reflected in more public spaces. Nevertheless these men are honestly expressing their feelings and in regards to a topic which previously men would have been compelled to comply.

Andy talked about his anxieties of losing his athletic identity when he injured his ankle, resulting in a long period out of Australian Rules football. He commented, 'It was a distressing event… I had to get ankle surgery, and because there was like a whole pre-season, the whole two years training that's gone. I was stressed with it yeah… because you thought that your career's over'. Similarly, Luke talked about how he is emotionally close to his father as a result of ill health. He mentioned, 'I'm closer to my dad because I look after him full time'. Finally, Ryan showed his disdain with orthodox masculinity and the requirement to be emotionally stoic. He said, 'I reject the thought process that you have to do it all on your own. I don't think that is really the greatest thing that… in a masculine sort of aspect, I think everyone needs to talk, needs to try and work out their problems. We all learn from each other'.

These narratives offer an insight to these athletes emotionally open personalities. By expressing their feelings, many of which are against requirement of orthodox masculinities, they are offering a softer gender performance than permitted in the previously homohysteric era of the 1980s (Mac an Ghaill, 1994). It is recognised that the topics discussed, somewhat despairingly, are all related to

elements of orthodox masculinity, but this is as a product of the interview schedule predominated with themes related to orthodox masculinities.

Intellectualising pro-gay attitudes

Recent additions to masculinities scholarship has found athletes acceptance of sexual diversity (Anderson, 2014). In this research, many participants discussed homosexuality and their positive attitudes towards gay men. They offered narratives of support and understanding towards diverse sexual orientations. In fact, only one of twelve expressed views that could be interpreted as homophobic, with the remaining eleven being inclusive and accepting of sexual diversity. Alfie, who identified as a heterosexual Christian male, recognises that others may have alternative sexual orientations to him. He discussed, 'I didn't really know much about homosexuality until I was in high school; I just didn't see much of it. It wasn't like really frowned upon; it's just different'. He made no derogative comments about sexual minorities throughout interview.

Discussing the acceptance of homosexuality, Rich conversed about his gay brother coming out. He said, 'Well my brother, he's gay. He came out when he was 18 while I was overseas. And nothing's really changed of that relationship'. Furthermore, Rich talked about how he was worried how some family members may respond to his brother's homosexuality, he explained: 'I worried about how the family would react because some of my family are quite religious and we were worried about their values and their beliefs and how they were going to love him and that kind of stuff'. Not only does Rich evidence he is okay with his brother being gay, he shows that he is aware and supportive with some of the difficulties his gay brother may have to overcome throughout the coming out process with other family members. Rich may have overly positive attitudes due to his close and loving brotherly relationship he has with a gay person, yet other participants also offered positive sentiments towards homosexuals without the same degree of connectedness.

Unlike Mac an Ghaill's (1994) research, whereby heterosexual men could not associate with homosexuals, Romeo talked about how he made a special effort to include a gay male in the year below him at school. He commented, 'We had one guy who was gay… he was in grade 11, I was in grade 12, I used to chat to him because I have gay friends where I come from and I don't look down on gay people'. Thus, w.Whereby Rich may proclaim his support for homosexuals due to the close loving

relationship he had with his brother, Romeo has no social structures influencing him to relate to the gay male in the year below. Romeo is not tied by family relations are unlikely to share classes or friendship groups with the gay male in the year below. As such, this is an overt and conscious effort of inclusion towards a sexually diverse male. Meanwhile, Luke was concerned about the stereotypical image some people have of homosexuals, saying, 'A lot of other people think of homosexuals and they just think they're gay and just AIDS… I've always been brought up to think they are normal people like you or me'.

Accordingly, in contrast to historical research (Griffin 1998; Pronger 1990), our study supports Anderson's (2014) findings, which reflects contemporary athletes as a having a more liberal attitudinal stance towards homosexuality. The evidence suggests that the Australian contact sport athletes in our research have supportive and inclusive views towards gay men.

Broader range of acceptable gender performances

The athletes in this study were also conscious of the broadened range of acceptable gender performances for men, which have previously been coded feminine, or girly (Plummer, 1999). Larry explained that being studious was no longer a relegated masculine behaviour: 'Respect is not how you fight, but is how you use your brain and how you achieve more by gaining tertiary qualifications'.

Rich discussed how he is now afforded the ability to use cosmetic products, such as facial moisturisers, which he perceived a decade ago would have led to him being labelled a 'fag'. Rich noticed a change in style for men, with guys wearing 'skinny tops and skinny jeans', which he is clear to mention that in the past it would've been deemed 'uncool or gay'. He noted, 'If males and females dressed like they do today, ten years ago or when I was 18/19, I reckon males would be ridiculed, the way they wear skinny jeans and skinny tops and all those things would've been seen as feminine'.

As a teacher, Rich has also noticed a change in the subjects that boys are engaging with at school, recognising that more boys now partake in feminine coded activities such as dance and drama. He mentioned, 'Half the boys are doing dance now. But if you go back, no-one, no boys ever did dance. All the boys are doing dance… no-one picks on them. There's more boys doing drama; not just the gay boys do drama anymore. It's all the boys doing drama'. Rich has recognised a broadening

of acceptable masculinity, which has encompassed many behaviours that once conflicted with orthodox masculinity. Whereas in previous times, such as the 1980s (Connell, 1995; Mac an Ghaill, 1994), men were unable to transgress rigid gender boundaries without question to their heterosexual identity (Kimmell, 1994), these men can present in feminine styles and engage in socially perceived effeminate activities.

The idea that masculinities and femininities had blurred was also explained by Romeo, who thinks that 'gender roles have swapped'. Similar to the comments made by Rich, Romeo gave examples of the widening of traditional gender boundaries, commenting that boys are now 'reading books and watching feminine movies' without stigmatization, as well as girls transgressing further onto the sports field. The advancement of women's sport was seen a gender progress for Romeo, but he especially noted the use of women as officials in men's rugby matches, emphasizing '…now you see female referees in rugby matches'. Although the advance of women's sport is more complex than just softer masculinities, we have noted this as Romeo offered these examples in a somewhat neutral manner. Rather than displaying overt misogyny, as was expected in alignment to orthodox masculinities, he presented female referees in rugby as a non-issue.

Attuned to social progress, Romeo discussed how society has changed in its understanding of masculinity:

> It's changed definitely from past, like in the past 10 years. The way men dress and stuff like that… if I ever carried hair straighteners at high school. And did my hair before school. I would have probably been strangled with the hair straighteners. The guys now are taking much more care of themselves… today you got a cosmetics section, half men and half women. But you go back ten-fifteen years ago… you were supposed to have dirt in your face… your hair was supposed to be scruffy… masculinity is changing… for the female version of like a male.

Romeo recognises that the acceptable boundaries of heterosexuality have shifted, blurred and become significantly more flexible, something documented by numerous scholars (Adams, 2011; Crocket, 2012; Dashper, 2012; Drummond et al., 2015; Jarvis, 2015; Magrath, Anderson and Roberts, 2014; Morris and Anderson, 2015; Roberts, 2013, 2014; Ward, 2015) in their field of inclusive masculinity.

Discussion

Competitive contact sports have traditionally been seen as a locale for the reproduction of conservative orthodox masculinity (Hargreaves, 1986;). Through its combative nature, boys and men have traditionally developed a socially valued behaviour based upon emotional restriction and homophobia in order to establish power over subordinated men (Connell, 1995). Here, sport was somewhat oppressive to those who are non-heterosexual (Griffin, 1998; Pronger, 1990) and who don't present in accordance to masculine ideals of behaviour (Connell, 1995). It is this masculine framework, that this research was launched with.

However, recent research is recognising that male athletes today are displaying more inclusive behaviours that are now esteemed to young men in western society. Our results supported this. Thus, we utilise Inclusive Masculinity Theory (Anderson, 2009), to explain the decline of cultural homohysteria (McCormack and Anderson, 2014) in this setting. This is because we find that, among the young men interviewed, they were happy to engage in homosocial behaviours, espouse pro-gay attitudes and present in highly effeminate manners (Anderson, 2014; McCormack, 2012; Morris and Anderson, 2015).

The men in our study were somewhat emotionally open throughout our interviews, proffering narratives counter to previous orthodox ideals of masculinity (Connell, 1995; Mac an Ghaill, 1994). Behaviours that may have previously been lauded as symbols of masculinity, such as sleeping with married women or losing one's virginity at an early age, were opposed. Whilst these men did engage in such behaviours, at some time in their lives, thereby aligning to orthodox notions of masculinity, they currently challenge them, at least, attitudinally.

We recognise that the research environment may be conducive to disclosure of a personalised self (Goffman, 1959), we have no evidence to suggest the attitudes presented are not reflective of them outside of the research locale. As such, our sample were happy to express their emotions openly without fear of being thought as feminine, often sharing their insecurities and anxieties around masculine expectations.

Furthermore, whereas previous literature has suggested athletes are homophobic (Griffin, 1998; Pronger, 1990), in tune with more recent research (Cleland, 2014) our participant's present positive narratives to sexual diversity; only one respondent offering a less accepting account towards gay men, we suggest that athlete's attitudes towards sexual diversity are improving in line with other inclusive masculinities research (Magrath et al. 2014).

Our participants described a blurring of acceptable gender styles, whereby men are socially afforded to present in previously effeminate ways. They were able to use cosmetics, wear tight and colourful clothing and engage in activities (such as school subjects) that would've previously only been acceptable for girls. They recognised that style had changed over time, something we suppose is as a response to diminishing cultural homohysteria (McCormack and Anderson, 2014). This is not new, with other research showing the increase in meterosexuality (Coad, 2008) and effeminate styles in sport (Adams, 2011).

We recognise that these men still engage in some tenets of orthodox masculinity, including their participation in combative team sports, excessive drinking and being sexually promiscuous. Yet, as they are also evidence of the wider cultural transformation of masculinities reflected in Australian society, whereby softer presentations of masculinity are evident (Drummond et al., 2015). Accordingly, the narratives of these twelve Australian contact sportsmen, from the codes of rugby union, rugby league and Australian rules football, have challenged many of the characteristics of orthodox masculinity and contribute to the expanding portfolio of inclusive masculinities literature (Anderson, 2014; Anderson and McGuire, 2010; Channon and Matthews, 2015; Cleland, 2014; Crocket, 2012; Dashper, 2012; Drummond et al., 2015; Jarvis, 2015; Magrath, 2015; Morris and Anderson, 2015; Roberts, 2013, 2014).

Our research continues the discussion that athletes can no longer be inherently assumed emotionally sheltered and anti-gay without critical examination of the behaviours they display and how the athletes themselves interpret them. Significantly, our findings add to this body of literature, by examining the Australian context and offering further evidence of contact sports men. Finally, by utilising in-depth interviews, rather than ethnography, coupled with a heterosexual interviewer, the researcher affect is significantly reduced in this study in comparison to some other IMT research projects, often conducted by Anderson (Anderson, 2014) (who is gay). We suggest further research to be conducted in the Australian context, focusing upon injury, violence and athlete identity utilising IMT as a theoretical framework.

We must recognise that homohysteria varies between contexts, times and social institutions (McCormack and Anderson, 2014) and it's not our intent to imply that our findings are reflective of men globally. We are instead suggesting that

masculinities are significantly more complex and therefore further research needs to continue to establish male behaviour in a variety of environments.

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